

Belmar Fishing Club
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Ocean Avenue and First Street,
on the Boardwalk

Belmar
Monmouth County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1079

HABS
NJ
13-BELMAR,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BELMAR FISHING CLUB

HABS NO. NJ-1079

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NJ
13-BELMA,
3-

Location: Ocean Avenue and First Street (on the boardwalk), Belmar, Monmouth County, New Jersey

Present Owner: Belmar Fishing Club
P.O. Box 38, Belmar, New Jersey 07719

Present Use: Fishing and social club

Significance: The Belmar Fishing Club building is typical of the recreational club house and/or public structures erected in the resort communities of New Jersey's coastal region during the early twentieth century. Its Spanish Mission style was welcomed by the Belmar community as appropriate seashore architecture in 1929-30. The presence of such clubhouses also reflect nearly two centuries of sport and leisure activity along the coast.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Construction on the current clubhouse-- intended to replace the smaller, original structure-- began in September of 1929. It was dedicated on May 30, 1930.¹
2. Architect: John Bostock volunteered his services in the design of the clubhouse.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Ocean Beach Association purchased the land on July 1, 1881. The Shark River Company bought the property in order to build a fishing pier and two-story lodge. A stock company--the Ocean Pier Company--leased the pier for ten years, keeping the option to lease for another ten, but on January 10, 1910, the Ocean Pier Company purchased the property from the Shark River Company. The Belmar Fishing Club (BFC) then bought the pier and building from the Ocean Pier Company.²
4. Builders, suppliers: Clarence Stines-- also a club member-- served as the general contractor. Unnamed members probably supplied plumbing, lumber, drapes³
5. Original plans and construction: The original plans have not been located, but the club

¹ BFC 50th Anniversary Yearbook, 1909-1959.

² Ibid.

³Article dated October 11, 1928, Memorabilia book

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has plans from later renovations.

6. Alterations and Additions: In 1934, the BFC added a "marine vista" to the east end of club house by enclosing the existing one-story porch, and adding two more bays. This addition provided room for dances and other programs. The same year, the club built a log-cabin at the pier's eastern end. There was no change in land configuration until 1939, when the club, through the guarantees of its Board of Governors, bought a 30' x 100' parcel north of the clubhouse, including riparian rights. The pier has undergone much rebuilding because of severe storm damage. The Club decided at its 1939 annual meeting to add 200' to the end of pier. This work was completed by the Thomas Proctor Company of Long Branch, and dedicated in May, 1940. A September 14, 1944 hurricane carried away the new pier and 85' of old one. It was rebuilt by 1946 at a cost of \$34,000. The central portion was swept away in November 1950, and rebuilt. In August 1957 the Club completed a new extension after a November 1954 storm.⁴

In the spring of 1954, a new kitchen was built on the north side property bought in 1939, with much of the equipment donated by members. The area between the main club room (the Farrier room) and marine vista was remodelled and named Peacock Alley. The ladies and mens rest rooms were also remodelled at that time. Lockers, showers, and a powder room were added to provide female members with bathing facilities. The Club in the winter of 1957-8 replaced the tap room bar with an oval bar. Also in 1958, the kitchen was upgraded with a freezer and new dish washer, and most rooms were redecorated. The picture windows in Peacock Alley and the Tap room were added at this time, as was an awning over the South porch. Members also donated chairs, round tables, and umbrellas for the south porch.⁵

Numerous decorative details of the entry porch have been changed. The King Neptune head located above the central entry is gone, as are the carved rafter ends which protruded above the arches on both the front and rear porches. Many of the fish have been obscured, and BFC now marches across the front in large block letters. Recent plate-glass windows on the second-floor front have replaced the original wide, multi-paned sash with muntins. Taken together, many of these now-altered details originally gave the building its Spanish Mission character.

Decorative aspects: The main club room, originally furnished with wicker, was redecorated with red leather chairs and sofas (probably in 1958), but recently the red leather furniture was discarded, and the original wicker refurbished. The main club room until recently had a valence decorated with fish trophies--but these had become badly deteriorated.

B. Historical Context:

⁴ BFC 50th Anniversary Yearbook.

⁵ Ibid.

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On September 1, 1909, forty-nine men met in Charles Reimuller's Hardware Store in Belmar to establish the Belmar Fishing Club (BFC). They set annual dues at \$1 and within a week had adopted a constitution and bylaws. The members made an arrangement with the Ocean Pier Company, which owned a pier on Belmar's beach, to use the pier and build a club room--the Ocean Pier Club gave discounted season tickets to the BFC. Within a few years, however, the Ocean Pier Club was unable to reimburse the BFC for repairs the latter made to its pier and building. OCP members settled one \$1,200 debt by endorsing stock over to the BFC, and in 1919 the BFC created a board of trustees to hold the stocks in trust. The BFC gradually gained control over the OPC, and in 1929 the BFC modified the original deed so that the Club could build a larger structure. The old club building was a plain, unassuming, wood structure which was too small for the club's needs (see page 9). On June 14, 1929 the BFC Holding Company was incorporated to hold property, and construction began on the new clubhouse on September 21 of the same year.⁶

Although the Belmar Fishing Club agreed on the need for a new, larger clubhouse, the members faced some disagreements over the design of the structure. On August 6, 1928, the Club's president Benjamin Farrier sent to all members a photograph of a rendering of the proposed club. The design appears nearly residential; the two-story rectangular building is entirely symmetrical except for a substantial chimney at the north end of the house. The front facade faced the street, and the second story had three bays of windows, each consisting of four eight-light casement windows. The first story had three sets of french doors. A porch extended around the first story, with paired doric columns, a diagonally crossing balustrade, and a shallow, hipped roof. The front appears to have some green shrubs, and possibly a lawn. All of the second-floor windows have homey white curtains. The rendering is not a very sophisticated illustration.

President Farrier wrote in the accompanying letter that the structure-- at a cost of \$20,000-- would measure 30' x 60', and would have porches all around. One member, Paul Zizinia, saw some potential profit in this project, and proposed that if he donated an adjacent strip of land to the BFC, that the club would accept certain restrictions, including using fireproof materials. His offer met resistance, as he stated in an open letter to the BFC dated September 5, 1929. "The Club does not seem willing to do anything but build the cheapest kind of a structure, and I have been asked to approve plans which I consider a disfigurement to Belmar's beachfront, and undue obstruction to my adjoining property and an unnecessary fire hazard." The club tried to patch up the dispute peacefully that fall, and on January 4th, 1929 the BFC politely declined Zizinia's offer because of the expense of a fire-proof building, and his numerous restrictions on his gift. At the same time, a consensus emerged that the plans needed to be redone. The Mayor, approving the second sketch, publicly denied that he had ever approved the first one. The first design passed into oblivion, condemned as a cheap-looking building, and of a style not suitable to the town's aspirations and progressive self-perception.

The publicity which accompanied the clubhouse's dedication reveals some of the issues underlying the club's design. Belmar's small size did not diminish the municipal pride at stake in the city's beachfront architecture. Undoubtedly, the town had an eye on Spring Lake immediately to the south, which had just constructed a grand oceanside saltwater bathing

⁶ 50th Anniversary Booklet

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pavilion, and had plans to erect a second one in the next few years. In the late 1920s Atlantic City, Ashury Park, and Ocean City, all built major beachside public halls; the first two were extremely large. Although a private club, the fishing clubhouse clearly evoked a general municipal pride.⁷ The former pier had allowed public access, so perhaps the club had a certain following from that history. And The Coast Advertiser of May 30, 1930 found that the club generally supported Belmar affairs "not related to fishing, or to the club in any way."⁸ The Mayor, in his dedication speech, associated the private club's construction with the money he claimed to have invested during his administration in beachwork.⁹

One article praised the club as follows: "in design it is modernistic enough to be attractive in the future as well as it is now."¹⁰ The stuccoed Spanish Mission design must have looked solid and enduring, as well as fashionable. A reporter described the "Palatial Home" of the Belmar Fishing Club, perhaps in comparison to the rest of the waterfront and the club's previous, modest home.¹¹ The style roughly resembled the Music Pier at Ocean City, where Spanish style established a firm hold in the 1920s and 1930s in the Flanders Hotel, the Music Pier, and other boardwalk buildings and private homes. The local promotional newspapers emphasized that the clubhouse was a progressive design, a modernistic style which nevertheless avoided faddishness.

The press also admired certain design elements of the building--the second-floor view, the breezeway porches, and the long pier. The external decorative details won praise--the Head of King Neptune over the entry, the club insignia, and fish swimming on the walls in "realistic poses." The fireplace had admirers, and reporters noticed that the "stairway...gives a realistic nautical effect."¹² Another reviewer found that "While designed essentially as a headquarters for anglers, the new clubhouse is of an architectural style that blends admirably with its marine background."¹³ Generally, the promotional press found every aspect of the club's design to be suitably modern and maritime; one reporter commented that "One can readily imagine oneself pacing the deck of an ocean liner."¹⁴ Although certain aspects of beachfront architecture had remained constant--the views and the emphasis on porches--the Spanish Mission style had met with firm approval in this sympathetic community. The beach required a distinctive style (probably partly explaining the rejection of the plain, domestic-looking first design), and had

⁷ 1 June 1930 clipping, BFC Memorabilia Book.

⁸ The Coast Advertiser, 30 May 1930.

⁹ Asbury Park Press, 30 May 1930.

¹⁰ The Coast Advertiser, 30 May 1930.

¹¹ 30 June 1930

¹² Unidentified clipping, about 30 May 1930, BFC Memorabilia Book.

¹³ 1 June 1930.

¹⁴ 30 May 1930

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moved beyond the Victorian-era wooden pavilions. Belmar's residents could feel that their fishing club competed honorably with Spring Lake's pavilion just to the South.

The Belmar Fishing Club, at the time the building's dedication, counted more than 500 members, and its president Benjamin Farrier was president of the Association of Surf Anglers Clubs of America, and also of the Miami Beach Rod and Reel Club. While one article claimed that "The membership is composed of sportsmen from just about everywhere and from all walks of life," another "welcomed a club composed of such prominence, wealth, and keen business conception."¹⁵ Both statements undoubtedly held some truth. With its large size, relatively low fees, and inexpensive equipment, the fishing club was probably more egalitarian than most contemporary private yacht clubs. The BFC also had tight ties to North Jersey, from which it drew most of its members, implying that its prestigious members might not be quite as elevated as those clubs with roots in New York City or Philadelphia. At the same time, the Governor was scheduled to speak at the dedication (though he withdrew at the last minute), and Herbert Hoover sent flowers. Perhaps a point of comparison is with the Little Egg Harbor Yacht Club in Beach Haven, some of the early meetings were held in the largest auto garage on the East Coast, Ostendorff's, while the BFC organizers met in a more modest hardware store, Reimuller's.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Belmar Fishing Club is a two-story stucco Spanish Mission building. Although Mission in style, the building maintains a nautical theme in its overall shape, its rows of horizontal windows, and stairs. The main club room, with its massive stone fireplace, dark-stained wood beams, and its taxidermied fish trophies is reminiscent of a hunting lodge.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in very good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building is a rectangular, two-story, three-bay-by-five-bay structure with an arcaded front porch/hallway and a single-story, flat-roofed rear addition.
2. Foundations: The front portion of the building including the full basement has concrete foundations. The ocean-side rests on wood creosote pilings.
3. Walls: The walls are of wood framing with a stucco finish. Decorative swimming fish appear on south wall.

¹⁵ Clippings 30 May 1930, and 1 June 1930.

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4. Structural system, framing: The building has a steel frame covered with wood sheathing.
5. Porches: The west side has a one-story porch running the length of the facade, with three round-arched bays at the front and two on the side. The flat roof of this porch can be used as a second story balcony. The porch has a castellated parapet, matching that of the main roof. The originally matching porch at the east end has been doubled in size and enclosed to create additional indoor space. An unsheltered porch is also built out on the club's south side.
6. Chimneys: The building has one chimney on the north side, venting the massive stone and cement fireplace in the Farrier room.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: A small entry vestibule has been built out into the west porch.
 - b. Windows: The second-floor windows, on the south facade, consist of four groups of triple six-over-one-light windows, and one double at the east end. The south-side first-floor windows for most of the building are square, single-light fixed. These modified the original window design, which in shape echoed the porch arches.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The building has a flat roof with castellated parapets, accented with sections of Spanish-style red tile shed roof. The roofline at the west front consists of a round arched parapet with sloping sides, flanked by sections of red tile shed roof and a castellated parapet. To the rear of the structure are crossing, tile-covered gables. The roof of the rear one-story extension is flat, with a castellated parapet, as is the front porch.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
 - a. Cellar: The building's front portion (underneath the Farrier Room) has a full basement, including mens' and womens' showers, and lockers for fishing gear.
 - b. First floor: Walking through the building from the main entry to the ocean side, one encounters first the entry porch, the main club room (Farrier Room), a short hall, and then an open eating/drinking room--the "marine vista" and tap room. Adjoining the tap room to the north is the kitchen addition.
 - c. Second floor: Two rooms occupy the second floor--the "assembly room" at the west end, and the small "hall of fame"/administration office to the east.

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2. Stairways: The main stair from the Farrier room to the second floor, can be closed off from sight by a set of double doors, leaving the wide, rounded first three steps. After passing through the doors the stairs rise to a landing, and then divide steamboat style, each side leading up to the second floor.
3. Flooring: The original wood floors are seen throughout.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The ceiling of the Farrier room has exposed wood beams with dark stain, and similar dark wood frames a valence in the room, and accentuates the corner vertical studs. The second-floor assembly room has fewer revealed beams, painted a light color. The tap room and administrative offices do not have exposed beams.
5. Doorways and doors: The only notable interior door leads from the Farrier room to the stairs going up to the second floor--double doors with ten lights each, and a lower wood panel.
6. Decorative features: There is a massive fireplace, dark wood beams in Farrier room, and a valence for fish trophies.
7. Mechanical systems:
 - a. Lighting fixtures: The second-floor lighting fixtures have an interesting maritime theme, but do not seem to be original (from early photographs). The Main club room has a chandelier.
 - b. Heating: The heating system is a combination hot-water baseboard, and gas-fired air.

D. Site:

1. General Setting: The front of the building is oriented towards the land side, with a boardwalk patio separating the structure from the public boardwalk.
2. Outbuildings: There is a fishing shack at end of pier, as well as a seating pavilion. The pier itself has been rebuilt several times because of storm damage.

Prepared by: Alison Isenberg
HABS Historian
Summer 1992

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Old views: The Belmar Fishing Club possesses a Memorabilia book with numerous early photographs. The Anniversary year books of 1959 and 1949 also have extremely helpful photographs, many of interiors.

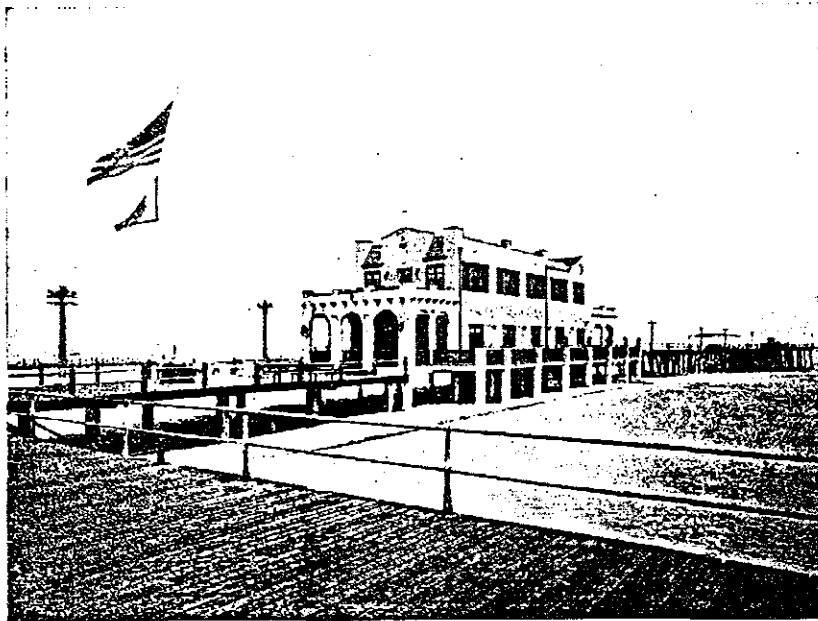
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B. Primary and unpublished sources: The Memorabilia book is an essential place to start, along with the Anniversary year books, and other historical materials preserved by the club. See also:

Sebold, Kimberly, and Sara Amy Leach. Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail: Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991.

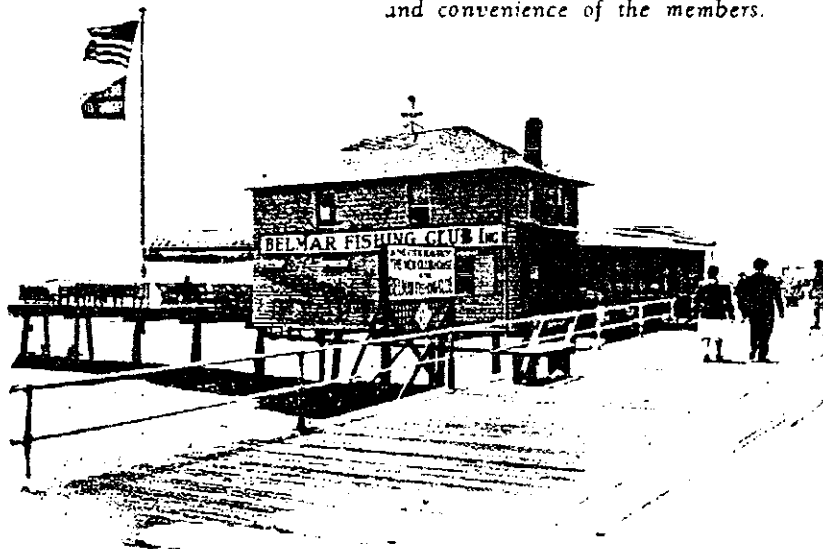
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian. The project was completed during summer 1992. The project historian was Alison Isenberg (University of Pennsylvania). The photography was produced by David Ames, University of Delaware, Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering.



The New Club House

This handsome building is the realization of a dream which covered a period of 20 years. Nothing has been omitted that would contribute to the comfort and convenience of the members.



The Old Club House 1909

The following data pages are extracted from:

The Belmar Fishing Club, "40th Anniversary 1909-1949," booklet composed to commemorate the founding of the Club, Belmar, N.J., 30 May 1949, Collection of The Belmar Fishing Club.



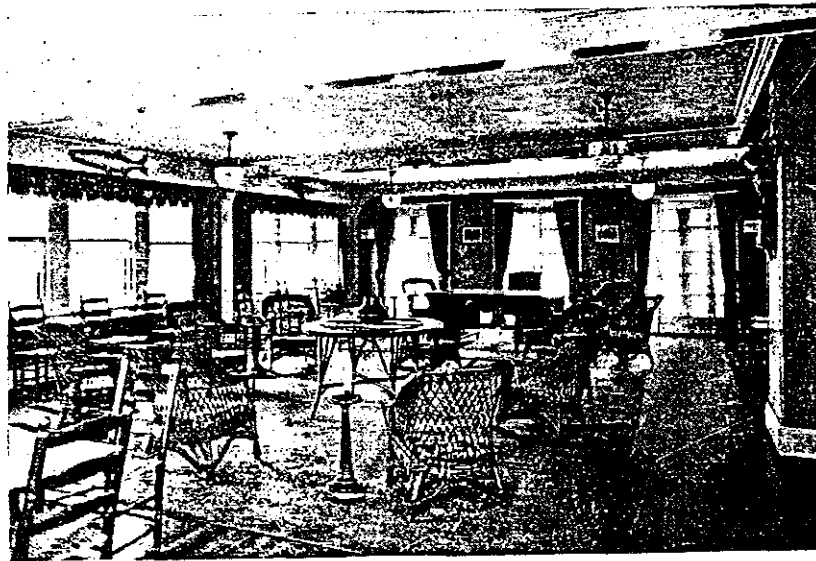
Farrier Room, first floor, East View



Farrier Room, first floor, West View

Beautifully appointed — a panel running around the entire room finished to represent a stretch of ocean which forms a background for an invaluable collection of mounted fish. A great stone fire place adds to the attractiveness of this room.

The Belmar Fishing Club, "40th Anniversary 1909-1949."



Assembly Room. second floor, West View



Assembly Room. second floor, East View

The views from the second floor assembly room are magnificent, as one looks over the broad expanse of the ocean, or watching the outgoing and incoming craft as they pass through the Shark River Inlet.

The Belmar Fishing Club, "40th Anniversary 1909-1949."



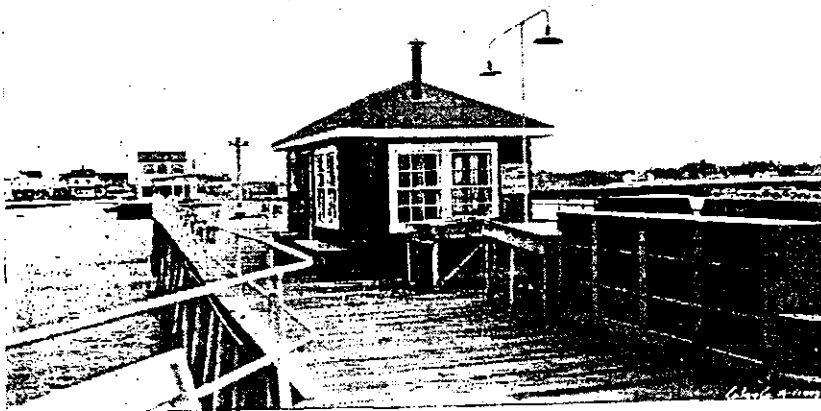
South Porch



The Marine Vista, where we dine and dance.

This room gives one the impression of being on board ship. Situated on the easterly portion of the club house, one could not find a more delightful spot to dine.

The Belmar Fishing Club, "40th Anniversary 1909-1949."



Fishermen's Log Cabin and Bait House

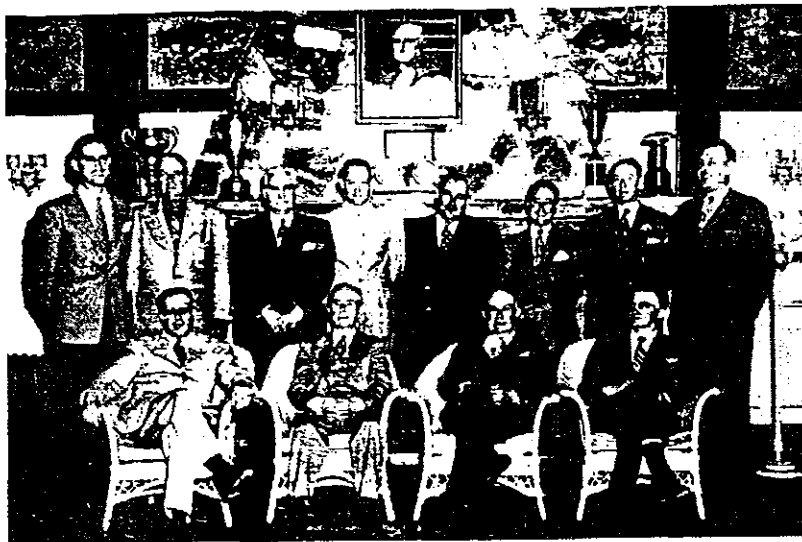


Dedication Ceremonies of New Pier. July 27, 1946

The Belmar Fishing Club, "40th Anniversary 1909-1949."



Administration Office and Card Room.



Officers and Board of Governors, 1949

Standing (l. to r.) Merwin Bryan, Charles H. Hall, Jr., Edgar D. Elder, Nils Johnson, Ralph M. Allaire, Walter S. Gundaker, Jr., John H. Yauch, Jr., and Frank Hughes.

Seated (l. to r.) Edward J. Ascher, Vice-President, Arthur W. Ross, President, Fred Rosseter, Treasurer, George Harvey, Secretary.

The Belmar Fishing Club, "40th Anniversary 1909-1949."